

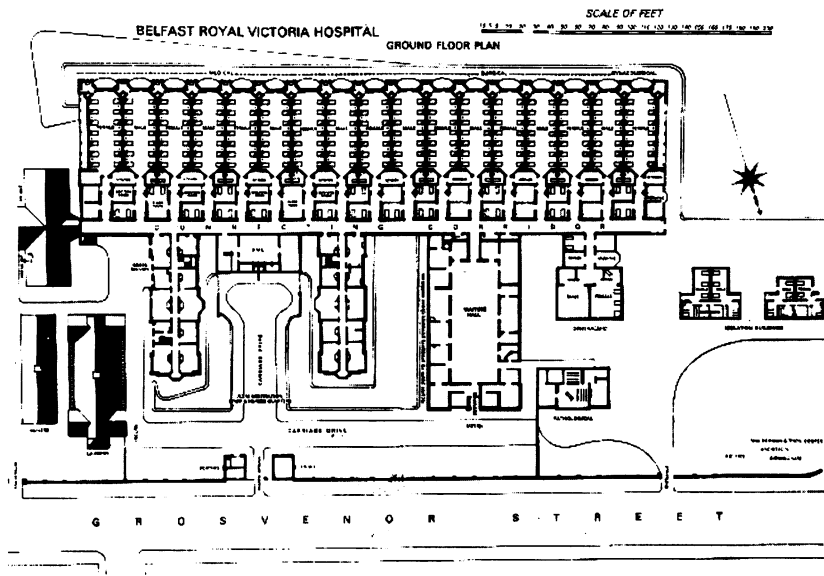
## Historical Review:

# A Corridor to the Past

## Annual Oration at the opening of the 1993-94 teaching session at the Royal Victoria Hospital

R S J Clarke

A primary purpose of this opening address for the winter session of the Hospital is to welcome the new students. I sometimes hear of medical students in mid-stream wondering whether they have chosen the right profession or more definitely stating that they have made a mistake. This often arises from exhaustion by the scientific pressures of the first three years, and I can only say that it is rarely a complaint in the final years. In fact, my advice to the clinical students would certainly be to enjoy your ward work to the full. As a student one has time to talk to patients which is never available so freely again as House Surgeon or Registrar, and this is what makes medicine interesting. The patients are available in the wards not, as is sometimes feared by outsiders, as victims to be preyed on by the students, but as people who love to talk about themselves and hear other more or less informed views on their condition.



*Fig. 1* Original plan of the Royal Victoria Hospital with its 17 Wards and "connecting corridor". To the left can be seen the intake of the plenum ventilation system, the boiler house and laundry. The east and west wings are not joined on the north side as at present and the "waiting hall" as shown is now a kitchen and serving area.

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*Fig. 2* Window given by Dr William Whitla to the Belfast Royal Hospital in 1886. It was transferred to the new Royal Victoria Hospital in 1903.

One might well ask cynically “why is an anaesthetist telling us this when he only sees patients asleep?” This a misconception for it is part of an anaesthetist’s duties to talk to the patient pre-operatively to explain about the anaesthetic, pain relief and the pros and cons of general or local techniques. In the process he cannot avoid hearing about the problems of getting in the hay crop, or carrying the shopping up the hill in Ligoniel. The more intelligent comments he can make on these points, the more he will impress the patient and enjoy the interview.

Learning communication skills should begin as a student and nowhere better than in the big old-fashioned wards of the Royal. I come therefore, to sing the praises of this Institution as it is, to remind you of its past benefactors and to suggest what lessons we may learn from their efforts.

The corridor of the Royal Victoria Hospital is well known to all medical graduates of Queen’s University, and members of the staff of the hospital, as a place where one is bound to meet friends and colleagues over the day (Fig. 1). However it also has a number of tablets above the wards and nearby, commemorating donations to the hospital and, in view of the changes in the hospital under discussion, it seemed appropriate to record systematically the source of the donations and the inscriptions.

Even more striking than the tablets is the Good Samaritan window at the east end of the corridor (Fig. 2). It shows of course the Samaritan helping the man who had been beaten up 2000 years ago – an image as common now as it was then, while the Priest and the Levite walk past with the thought – “It’s not my problem”. The four coats of arms highlight the early history of the Hospital and its partner the University. (1) The Belfast Royal Hospital founded in 1792 as the General Dispensary and later as the Belfast General Hospital, only becoming the Belfast Royal Hospital in 1875. The roundel shows the Royal Arms and those of the City of Belfast. (2) The Queen’s University in Ireland. (3) The Queen’s College, Belfast. (4) The Royal University of Ireland.

The window was originally given to the Belfast Royal Hospital in Frederick Street in 1886 by Dr William Whitla. With the erection of the new Royal Victoria Hospital which opened in 1903, the window was transferred to the new “Extern Hall” where it was situated at a high level above the entrance door. Then when this large hall was split horizontally in 1947 the window was moved to its present position. We are fortunate that this window has survived the moves of over 100 years as a fitting reminder of this great physician and teacher. The career of Dr (later Sir William) Whitla is fully documented elsewhere <sup>1</sup> and it should only be stated here that he was one of the “Olympians” of the Belfast General Hospital <sup>2</sup> and a benefactor also of the Queen’s University, the Ulster Medical Society and Methodist College Belfast.

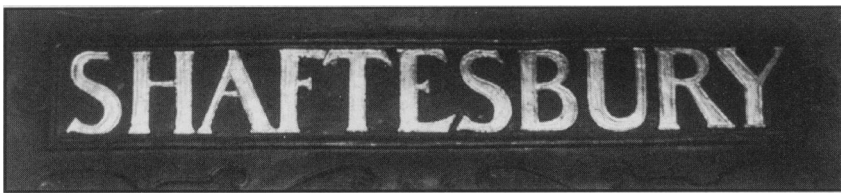
Immediately below the window is a tablet to James Girdwood which was also transferred here from the Belfast General Hospital. (Fig. 3) The tablet reads “This memorial is erected by the late Mr Girdwood’s numerous friends who have deeply mourned his removal from their midst, to record their high estimation of him as a citizen and his sterling worth as a friend. Also to testify their admiration for his indefatigable energy and invaluable services on behalf of this Institution for a period of eighteen years”. He was born on 23 January 1823 and



*Fig. 3* Bust of James Girdwood, honorary treasurer of the Belfast Royal Hospital, 1854-1873.

owned a carpet, damask and wallpaper warehouse at 44 High Street, Belfast.<sup>2,3</sup> He must have been well organised to be able to leave his business to run itself in 1854, when he was only 31, and devote himself to the unpaid task of Hospital Treasurer. Again and again it was said that the hospital's growing prosperity was due to his far-seeing and shrewd handling of the finances. James Girdwood was married, with a family, and died on 14 September 1873, being buried in Knockbreda Parish graveyard. A bust by S F Lynn, ARHA and C B Birch was completed in 1876 and erected in the Board Room of the General Hospital and under it was the inscription "So long as the Hospital exists his name will never cease to be associated with it". It is now in the King Edward Building.

In turning to the named corridor wards, one must admit that the headings above them are somewhat cryptic and deserve to be better understood. Even the doctors and nurses who pass under the bronze plaques would admit to total ignorance of the people commemorated and this is only a little helped by the additional marble tablets in the wards themselves. It must be stressed that the sum represented by a named ward was considerable – a minimum of £10,000 in 1900 or about £250,000 in modern terms. On the other hand, the less prosperous could name a bed for £500 and most donations to the Hospital came from church collections, Saturday street collections and gifts from all the workpeople of Belfast – sums like 3/6d from the carpenters in the Belfast Ropeworks or £4.5.6d. from the tug boat and barge men of the Belfast Harbour.



**Ward 1** The name Shaftesbury commemorates Anthony, eighth Earl of Shaftesbury (1831-1886),<sup>4</sup> son of the noted philanthropic seventh Earl who had been involved in redressing the great social evils of the Victorian era (including the exploiting of little children as chimney sweeps). His connection with Belfast was his marriage in 1857 to Harriet, daughter and heiress of the third Marquis of Donegall.<sup>5</sup> Her only brother, the Earl of Belfast, who died of scarlatina in Naples in 1853 had been a popular and romantic figure in Belfast social life, and is commemorated by a rather beautiful statue in the City Hall. The third Marquis built Belfast Castle c 1868 to replace Ormeau House and

when he died in 1883 his wealth and the castle passed to Harriet and her husband. They and their son, the ninth Earl of Shaftesbury (1869-1961), continued the family interest in the Belfast Royal Hospital and in 1889 sealed this with a gift of the ground in Frederick Street on which it was built. When the General Hospital moved they extended this gift and a tablet in the ward records that "This ward has been called the Shaftesbury Ward in grateful recognition of the generous action of Harriet, Countess of Shaftesbury, and her son Anthony Ashley-Cooper, the ninth Earl of Shaftesbury, in allowing the site of the old Royal Hospital in Frederick Street to be sold free of rent for the benefit of the endowment fund of this Hospital". The ninth Earl of Shaftesbury became Lord Mayor of Belfast in 1907 and first Chancellor of the newly created Queen's University of Belfast in 1908. He gave Belfast Castle and grounds to the City in 1934.



**Ward 2** This ward is named after the Riddel family of Beechmount in the Ballymurphy area, and specifically with the donation of Eliza and Isabella Riddel in memory of their father John, a successful hardware merchant. Their brother Samuel Riddel, who died in 1903, was a bachelor and having inherited from others in his family left nearly £500,000 in investments throughout the British Isles, USA and elsewhere, much of it in railway stock.<sup>6</sup> The sisters donated £10,000, as the ward tablet states "In memory of John Riddel and family of Beechmount, 1904", and also undertook to bear the cost of the construction of a house for the Medical Superintendent, then Colonel Andrew Deane.<sup>7</sup> The family in the same year also established a Demonstratorship in Pathology (for £5,000) and in 1912 gave a total of £45,000 to build and endow a hall of residence for women students at Queen's.<sup>8</sup> Riddel Hall was opened in 1915 and for the next 50 years was well-loved by the women students, as well as being one of the great social centres of the University. It was not actually the property of the University and became difficult to manage financially; in 1975 it was bought from the trustees by Queen's University for £232,000 and closed as a hall of residence. The building and grounds were subsequently occupied by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.



**Ward 3** This ward commemorates Ruby Gallaher, a daughter of Thomas and Robina Gallaher of Ballygoland, Whitehouse. Tom Gallaher, the founder of the tobacco firm was born in 1840 near Eglington and opened a shop at 7 Sackville Street, Londonderry. The business prospered and in 1870 he moved to much larger premises in Hercules Street (now Royal Avenue), Belfast. In spite of opposition from such unlikely people as the poet Swinburne, smoking received

support from the Prince of Wales and indeed almost everyone at that time. Tom Gallagher opened two factories in London, and in 1896 moved his main factory in Belfast to 138 York Street, converting it to a limited company with a capital of £1 million. He died on 3 May 1927 aged 87 and his share of the business passed to trustees.<sup>9</sup> Robina died on 30 October 1930, specifically leaving £10,000 in her will to the Royal Victoria Hospital. The tablet in the ward records that "This ward has been named by the late Mrs R M Gallagher of Ballygoland, Whitehouse, in memory of her daughter Ruby. This tablet was erected in 1931".

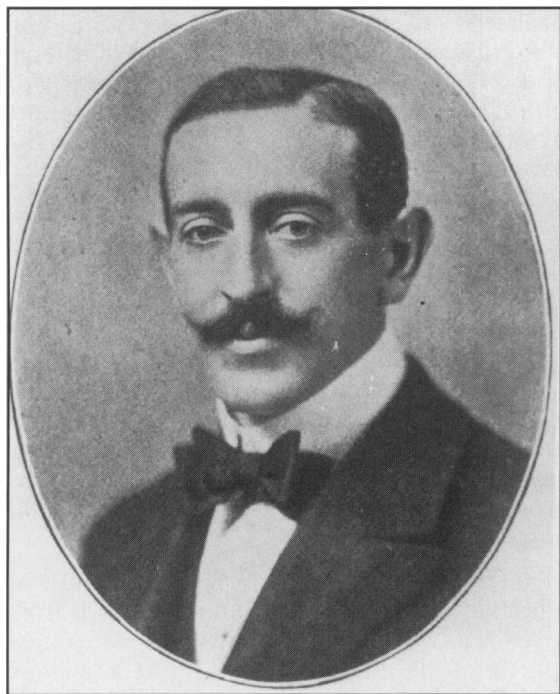


Fig. 4 Sir Milne Barbour, Bt, president of the Royal Victoria Hospital, 1939-1951.

**Ward 4** This ward is named after Sir Milne Barbour, Bt. notable as head of the largest linen thread company in the world at Hilden. This company was founded by John Barbour at Plantation, near Lisburn, c 1784, and in 1823, to obtain better water-power to drive his machinery, he moved it to Hilden to a 45 acre site with over 500 houses for mill-workers.<sup>10</sup> The company gradually swallowed up such firms as Dunbar, McMaster (Gilford), F W Hayes (Seapatrick), and Robert Stewart (Lisburn) and was chaired in succession by John Barbour's son William Barbour and later by the latter's son John D Barbour.<sup>11,12</sup> It became the Linen Thread Company in 1900 and John Milne Barbour (1868-1951)<sup>13</sup> of Conway, Dunmurry was its chairman for

most of the first half of this century. (Fig. 4) He was also Minister of Finance in the Northern Ireland Government, but his connection with the Royal Victoria Hospital was as President of the Hospital from 1939 until his death. He was created a Baronet in 1942 and died on 3 October 1951 leaving 3 daughters and no surviving son. He was on the governing bodies of many other hospitals and schools and was president of the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society, a body in which he had a special interest.



**Ward 5** The name Pirrie above Ward 5 is of course firmly associated with shipbuilding history in Belfast but it has an older connection with the Hospital. The first of the family in Belfast, William Pirrie had been born in Wigton in Scotland in 1780, travelled much as a ship's captain and settled in Belfast in the 1820s. <sup>15</sup> He was elected to the Ballast Board in 1827 which was responsible for improving Belfast Harbour by cutting across the curves at the lower end of the Lagan. He was later appointed one of the first Harbour Commissioners and opened the new Victoria Channel in 1849 by pouring a bottle of whiskey into the water.

William Pirrie married in 1810 Elizabeth Morrison and had four sons and four daughters. One of these, John Miller Pirrie studied medicine at Trinity College, Dublin, graduated MB in 1845 and MD in 1848, and in the latter year was appointed one of the physicians of the Belfast General Hospital. <sup>16</sup> He became senior attending physician in 1857 at which time he was also secretary to the medical staff and retired as honorary consulting physician in 1865. He died on 16 July 1873 in Liverpool at the early age of 48. <sup>17</sup>

Another son of William Pirrie was James Alexander Morrison Pirrie who was born in Belfast in 1822 and died in 1848 of cholera in Quebec. <sup>18</sup> He married (1849) Elizabeth Montgomery, niece of the Rev Henry Montgomery of Dunmurry, leader of the Non-Subscribing Presbyterians. His son William James Pirrie (1847-1924) after an education at the Royal Belfast Academical Institution entered the newly established firm of Harland & Wolff as an apprentice in 1862. <sup>15</sup> Twelve years later, when only 27, he became a partner and eventually its Chairman. William Pirrie was not only an Instonian but married Margaret Montgomery Carlisle (a first cousin) whose father John Carlisle was head of the English School there. Instonians will remember the pride the school still takes in this distinguished family, naming a house after him.

The plan to build the present hospital began in 1896 when William Pirrie was Lord Mayor of Belfast and he started the funds with donations of £5,000 from himself and £2,000 from his wife. <sup>19</sup> He was made chairman of the construction committee and was a strong supporter of the design by the architect William Henman, which became famous for its overhead window lights and plenum ventilation system. In this he had the support of the medical staff, notably Professor Cuming (medicine) and Professor Byers (gynaecology). The scheme was designed to supply clean, humidified air at a comfortable temperature throughout the hospital. It must be remembered that when it opened it was simply a corridor with 17 wards one side, together with East and West wings for staff quarters and administration, an Extern Department (where the kitchens now are) and an ophthalmic ward. Beneath the corridor is a great tunnel with an enormous fan which keeps the whole system of air moving, though the scares about Legionnaire's disease in the 1980s led to the abandonment of the simple humidifying mechanism.

William James Pirrie received honorary degrees from various universities and was created Baron Pirrie in 1906. He died on 27 August 1924 and was buried in the City Cemetery with a fine memorial which has recently been taken to Harland and Wolff Limited for safe keeping. Lady Pirrie was involved in all his philanthropic schemes and probably even more involved in this hospital.<sup>20</sup> She not only raised the £10,000 for the naming of Ward 5 but collected over £100,000 for the naming of beds. Her bust (by Mr A Bertram Pegram) is displayed facing the front entrance in the corridor (Fig. 5) and her full-length portrait hangs beside her husband's in the City Hall, an unusual distinction. She was in fact President of the hospital from 1914 until her death in 1935. The Marquis of Dufferin and Ava described her as "the most charming and most popular Lady Mayoress who ever sceptered a city or disciplined a husband".<sup>20</sup>

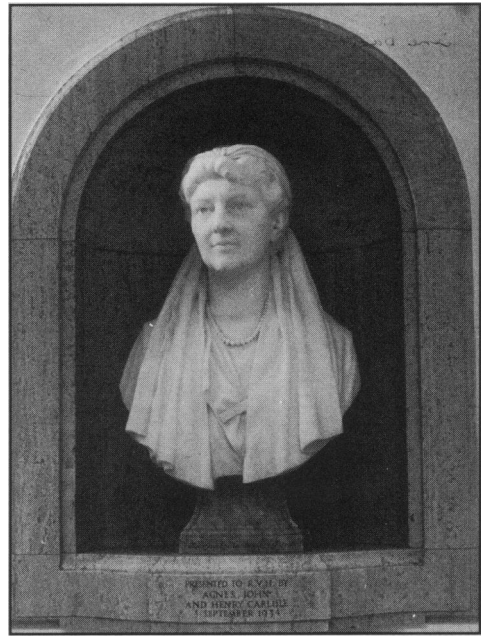
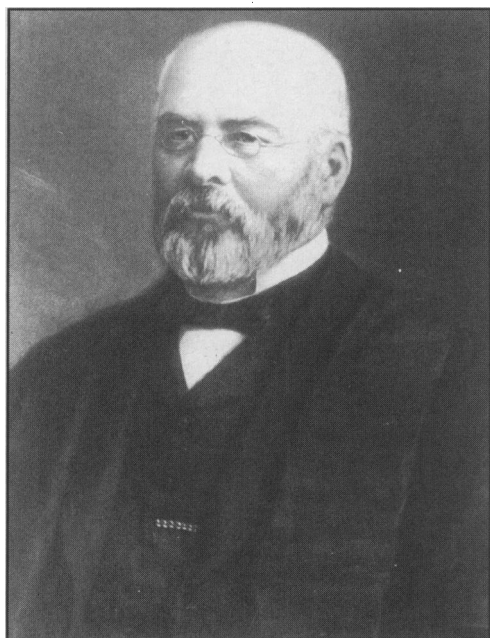


Fig. 5 Bust of Margaret, Lady Pirrie, benefactress, fund-raiser and president of the Royal Victoria Hospital, 1914-1935.



**Ward 6** This is named after Professor James Cuming (1833-99) who was one of the leading physicians in the Belfast Royal Hospital. He was born in Markethill, County Armagh, and trained in medicine at Queen's College, Belfast, 1849-56, graduating MD in 1855 and MA in 1858.<sup>21</sup> He was a fluent linguist and travelled throughout the continent, studying particularly the diseases of the nervous system and attending clinical demonstrations in the Salpêtrière, Paris, by such figures as Professor Charcot. James Cuming was only 25 when he was elected to the staff of the then Belfast General Hospital, where he remained attending physician until his death, becoming Professor of Medicine at Queen's College, Belfast, in 1864.<sup>22</sup> (Fig. 6) He lectured with enthusiasm on conditions like tabes and disseminated sclerosis, but he had lost all faith in any form of therapeutics and he seemed even to question whether diagnosis was possible.



Professor Cuming lived in Wellington Place but died at his country home in Greenisland of influenza on 25 August 1899, being buried in Milltown Cemetery.<sup>23</sup> He was enormously loved and respected and took an active part in the planning of the present Royal Victoria Hospital. For this reason particularly, Lady Pirrie undertook to collect £10,000 to name Ward 6 in his honour. There was an attractive bust of him in the ward but, like so much else, it was lost during refurbishment a few years ago.

*Fig. 6* Professor James Cuming, consultant physician in the Belfast Royal Hospital and Professor of Medicine at the Queen's University of Belfast, 1864-1899.



**Ward 7** The Belfast Co-Operative Society, along with so many other organisations in the City, took a keen interest in our hospital but specifically we have to thank James McCombe from the Braid valley area, a president of the Belfast branch of the Society, for the idea of endowing a ward. He was first a school teacher but entered the Customs and Excise Service at the Custom House, Belfast, in 1895 to work there for 40 years.<sup>24</sup> He pioneered the Belfast Co-Operative movement, joining its Board of Management in 1901 and becoming President in 1937. He was a prime mover behind the establishment of a Co-Operative Dairy in 1913 at a time when pasteurisation of milk was a new idea in Belfast. The Co-Operative movement had been founded in 1844 and in 1944 the members and employees joined to raise the necessary £10,000 to mark its centenary; in fact they raised £13,750 and sums were also given to the Mater Infirmorum and Royal Maternity Hospitals.<sup>25</sup>



**Ward 8** The title “Our Day” over Ward 8 is particularly obscure to us now but it harks back to the middle of World War 1 when the British Red Cross Society and the Order of St. John had a massive fund-raising effort. Between 1916 and 1918 Ulster raised a total of £146,000 for the “Our Day” effort and until well after the war the Hospital had many wounded soldiers as patients. In 1920 the joint committee of the societies decided to give the sum of £10,000 to name a ward in recognition of Belfast’s contribution to the welfare of the armed forces.<sup>26</sup>



**Ward 9** This was named in 1953 in recognition of the Honorary Medical Staff. We must remember that from inception of the hospital in 1792 until 1948 the senior doctors gave their services free and only the house physicians and house surgeons were paid.<sup>27</sup> Of course, they did not spend as much time as consultants spend now in the hospital, for they had to live by their private practice and might only visit the hospital twice a week to see the cases which the house doctors brought to their attention. Nevertheless, they carried the responsibility for running the hospital, and when there were problem cases, were always available for help. This system came to an end in 1948 and now the term Honorary Medical Staff or Consulting Staff is confined to our retired colleagues.



**Ward 10** With the Sinclair Ward, we are back with a family remembered for its support of the General Hospital in Frederick Street. The firm of John and Thomas Sinclair Ltd was in business as provision merchants in Tomb Street, Belfast from the 1830s, being involved in bacon curing and the pig trade generally.<sup>28</sup> Thomas Sinclair, JP, of Hopefield House, Belfast, had married

Sarah Archer, and eventually died on 2 January 1867 aged only 56. He was buried in the so-called New Burying Ground in Clifton Street,<sup>31</sup> and his ornate classical memorial has managed to survive the vandalism there. In recognition of his public contribution a public subscription in his honour raised the sum of £2,287.10s.4d which was given to the hospital as the Sinclair Memorial Fund.<sup>29</sup> As a result, the first accident ward in Frederick Street was renamed with a tablet reading "1869. Sinclair Memorial Ward", followed by a list of 40 subscribers. The family continued to support the hospital – for instance, we read in the minutes of 1882 "that the best thanks of the Board of Management are due to the members of the Sinclair Family for the excellent work they have done in completely renovating and supplying with all modern requisites the Sinclair Memorial Ward . . ." <sup>30</sup>

The family business was continued by his son the Rt. Hon. Thomas Sinclair, MP (1838-1914) who was noted as a Liberal and Liberal Unionist, twice President of the Belfast Chamber of Commerce, first Chairman of the Convocation of Queen's University and an Honorary D Litt.<sup>28</sup> Yet another Thomas Sinclair (1857-1940) of the same family was the second Professor of Surgery. He was a Queen's graduate winning many honours and was appointed Assistant Surgeon to the Belfast General Hospital in 1885, becoming Professor of Surgery in the following year.<sup>32</sup> He served in the army during World War I and is noted as having performed the autopsy on the German air ace Baron Von Richthoven.<sup>33</sup> He retired in 1923 at the age of 65 and was elected a Pro-Chancellor and Unionist MP for the University, dying in 1940. The name Sinclair was also perpetuated by the first Thomas Sinclair's grandson, Mr T Sinclair Kirk, a surgeon in the Belfast Royal and Royal Victoria Hospitals from 1896 to 1935, who died in 1940.<sup>33</sup>



**Ward 11** The name Charters is associated with benefactions to three of our great institutions – The Royal Belfast Academical Institution, the Belfast Charitable Institute and the General Hospital and once again we are dealing with a wealthy and generous business man.<sup>34</sup> John Charters (1795/6 - 1874) of Ardmoulin House, Falls Road, and later of Craigavad was proprietor of the Falls Flax Spinning and Weaving Company, which was one of the largest linen mills in the country. (Fig. 7) In 1865 he decided, following the example of Andrew Mulholland two years earlier, to finance the building of a complete surgical wing to the Hospital costing about £2,000, to be named the Charters Wing. He also paid for the building of a waiting room for visitors and for putting new railings and stone entrance gates in front of the hospital. He was appointed a Life Governor of the Hospital from 1864 until 1873 and died on 13 August 1874, being buried in the New Burying Ground<sup>35</sup> with a memorial fixed to the wall near the gate. There is a bust of him in Ward 11 with a tablet reading: "This bust was formerly in the Royal Hospital in Frederick Street, Belfast and was removed to



Fig. 7 John Charters, benefactor of the Belfast General Hospital and other institutions of the city

this position in the Royal Victoria Hospital to perpetuate the name of Charters so honourably associated by munificent generosity with this and many other charities in this City. Just after his donation to the General Hospital, he made a similar gift to the Poor House (now known as the Belfast Charitable Institute or Clifton House) so that a whole wing was erected in 1868 behind the main block.<sup>36</sup> These were later to be supported by the connecting wings of Edward Benn to form the unit of Clifton House which is still active today.

John Charters married and left several children, one of whom Anna Boomer Charters gave further donations to the hospital and endowed four scholarships at the Royal Belfast Academical Institution (1875).<sup>37</sup> Yet another daughter Katherina Maria married Dr William MacCormack, then a young and

impoverished Belfast surgeon, as Sir Ian Fraser has recorded in his 1968 address.<sup>38</sup> Both families had originally disapproved of the match but it was apparently very happy. In 1864 William MacCormack was appointed Visiting Surgeon to the General Hospital but in 1871 he moved to Harley Street and was very glad to borrow £4,700 from the Charters family to finance this ambitious step (a debt which incidentally he paid back in full). Plainly, John Charters came round to the marriage for it was only a few years later that he made his great donation to the General Hospital, influenced by his son-in-law. William McCormack achieved experience and fame in the Franco-Prussian and Turco-Serbian wars, was appointed to the staff of St Thomas' Hospital in 1871, given a Baronetcy in 1897 and died in 1901.

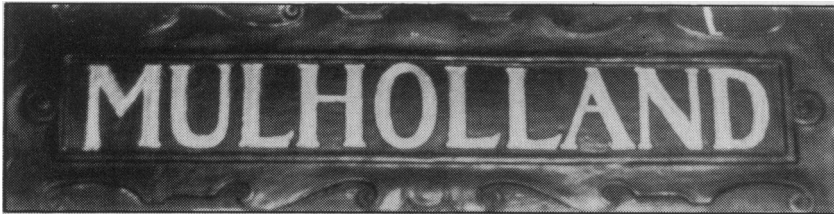


**Ward 12** It was dedicated to Sir William James Pirrie in 1903 and has a commemorative tablet in the ward which stresses his particular contribution: "This hospital owes its origin to the Rt Hon W J Pirrie and his wife Margaret M Pirrie of Ormiston, Belfast, who not only contributed largely to its construction and equipment, but by their untiring efforts in connection with its erection, furnishing and endowment, enabled it to be opened free of debt and made it an



efficient medium for the relief of the sick and the suffering poor. To perpetuate the memory of their many deeds of kindness to, and interest in this hospital, and to encourage others to do likewise, this ward bears the name W J Pirrie."

*Fig. 8* Sir William James Pirrie, benefactor and chairman of the Construction Committee for the building of the Royal Victoria Hospital, 1896-1903.



**Ward 13** The Mulholland family commemorated here were children of Thomas Mulholland (died 1821) a Belfast merchant, who had four sons including Andrew and St. Clair Kelburn.<sup>39</sup> In 1816 they erected a cotton mill in Winetavern Street and as it prospered moved in 1822 to a "green field" site in what is now York Street.<sup>40</sup> Then on Sunday 10th June 1828 the whole mill caught fire and was burnt to the ground. As a result of this the family decided to make a new start and switched from cotton to linen. They thus came in a little after John Barbour of Hilden and from the outset employed steam power for spinning and weaving of linen, which was then building up its world trade. Thomas and both sons were on the committee of the hospital from the 1820s and the sons were made Life Governors.<sup>41</sup>

Andrew, the elder of the two (1792-1866), built up the business into the York Street Flax Spinning Company which combined spinning and weaving of linen. It grew from 8,000 spindles in 1830 to 25,000 in 1856, bringing in huge profits even before the American Civil War (1861-5) cut off cotton supplies completely and helped it further. Andrew was elected Mayor of Belfast in 1845, built Ballywalter Park in 1846 and in 1865 gave the Ulster Hall the Mulholland organ.

His son took over the business and after 11 years as a Tory MP was created Baron Dunleath of Ballywalter.

St Clair Kelburne Mulholland (1798-1872) derived his distinctive name from the noted minister of the Third Presbyterian Congregation, the Rev St Clair Kelburn, who was imprisoned for 'seditious practices' before the 1798 rising. He was born in 1798 and as well as being involved with Andrew in the York Street Mill established his own company in Durham Street. He married in 1829 Margaret Wright and lived at Eglantine, Hillsborough, but his only son, also called St Clair Mulholland, died before him so the family business was wound up. It was St Clair Mulholland who in 1863 gave £2,000 in memory of this son to build the Mulholland wing of the General Hospital, a new ward of 30 beds at right angles to the main block.<sup>42</sup> He was one of our great benefactors, and dying on 27 January 1872 was buried at Eglantine.<sup>43</sup>

There are three tablets, side by side, in ward 13:

(1) A brass tablet transferred from Frederick Street, "In this ward which has been erected by a father's love to the Glory of God for the purpose of associating the memory of his only son St Clair Kelburne Mulholland, with the relief of human suffering, his mother and sisters have placed this tablet to record a hope full of immortality and stronger than sorrow through Jesus Christ Our Lord. Born June 9th 1830. Died at Sorrento, Italy, April 4th 1861".

(2) "This brass tablet was removed from its original position in the Frederick Street Royal Hospital and placed in this ward to continue and commemorate in this new Royal Victoria Hospital, the name of St Clair Kelburne Mulholland, Junior, son of St Clair Kelburne Mulholland, who was one of the original founders of the flax spinning industry in Belfast".

(3) "Epitaph. Thy body rests beneath the Italian sod,  
Thy soul's inheritance is the light of God.  
Yet here our hopes and memories of thee  
Who sleepest well beside the far blue sea.  
We twine, all fair and sunny as they are,  
With other sights and scenes that differ far,  
With sickness, mortal agony and tears,  
Yet not reproach from thee affection fears  
In anguish comforted and want sufficed  
Thy spirit joy'd on earth, is now with Christ.

Written by William Alexander, DD, in 1862, Bishop of Derry in 1867, Primate of all Ireland in 1896".



**Ward 14** The name Ismay is not as well known here, since the family did not live in Ireland and had only business connections. However, Thomas Henry Ismay really did contribute to the City by his support of our leading industry as well as by his Company's donation. He was born on 7 January 1837 in Maryport, Cumberland, the eldest son of Joseph Ismay, shipbuilder.<sup>44,45</sup> He left school at the age of 16 and was apprenticed to the Liverpool firm of Imrie and Tomlinson, Shipowners. He subsequently started business independently and in 1867 at the age of 31 he acquired the White Star Line of Australian clippers. He went on to form with William Imrie the Ocean Steam Navigation Company (1869). From this time he decided to introduce iron vessels to replace the wooden ships of the past and it was this change that connected him with Belfast. The American route was clearly the important one for both passengers and cargo and in 1869 Ismay's company ordered from Harland and Wolff no less than six large transatlantic steamers to sail between Liverpool and New York.

It is calculated that over 30 years the White Star Line paid Harland and Wolff the sum of £7,000,000. The 'Oceanic' (launched in 1871) was the first of these and the new features included greater passenger comfort, especially for the first class in the centre of the ship, more powerful but economical engines for speed and stability, and greater cargo capacity. The order necessitated considerable enlargement of Harland and Wolff's shipyard and started a long lasting partnership with the White Star Line.

T H Ismay was given the Freedom of Belfast in 1898 in recognition of his contribution to the City's prosperity. In return, he gave £1,000 to the building fund of the Royal Victoria Hospital and after his death on 23 November 1899 the White Star Line gave £10,000 to dedicate a ward as a memorial to him.<sup>46</sup>  
<sup>47</sup> He lived all his life in the Liverpool area and is buried in the churchyard of Thurstanton, near Birkenhead. The commemoration tablet in the ward reads: "In memory of the late Thomas Henry Ismay, founder of the White Star Line, this ward bears his honoured name. A sum of £10,000 was generously voted by the shareholders in the Oceanic Steam Navigation Company Limited at their Annual Meeting held 1 May 1901, towards the funds of this Hospital, as a permanent memorial to one who was closely identified with the prosperity of Belfast and its charities". Below are approximately 100 names of shareholders.



**Ward 15** This commemorates the Moore family, Eliza Jane and her brothers James and George L Moore, the latter being a solicitor from Limavady. George Moore graduated BA with honours at Queen's University, and was articled to a solicitor in Belfast where he practised for 20 years.<sup>48, 49</sup> He seems to have been a particularly successful investor here and when he moved to Forest Hill in London to engage in other business interests, was estimated to have an income of over £1 million annually (in 1920). (Fig. 9) He gave £150,000 to create a large park in London but was equally generous in Ulster, giving much to Limavady and £20,000 for a ward in the Royal Victoria Hospital, also in 1920. His recipe for long life he declared to a News of the World reporter — "Temperance in everything . . . freedom from worry, and having sound sleep until three o'clock in the morning".



*Fig. 9* George Moore, solicitor, and benefactor of the Royal Victoria Hospital, 1920.



**Ward 16** Edward James Harland was born in Scarborough, Yorkshire in May 1831 and was the sixth son of Dr William Harland, a general practitioner there.<sup>50</sup> Interestingly, as well as his medical practice, Dr Harland was an enthusiastic amateur scientist. In his younger days he had patented a steam carriage with a multi-tubular boiler for quickly raising high-pressure steam. He was a close friend of George Stephenson of railway engine fame. Edward went

to school in Edinburgh and was determined, in spite of parental pressure, to be an engineer. As a result he was apprenticed to Robert Stephenson & Company of Newcastle-on-Tyne and, as well as working on the design of railway engines became involved in lifeboats and the design of iron ships. Thence he moved to Clydebank as a journeyman shipbuilder, then to Newcastle again and in 1854 at the age of 23 he was appointed manager of Robert Hickson's shipyard in Belfast.

When Edward arrived he strove to raise standards and to push for harder work and, in spite of financial difficulties and strikes from disgruntled workmen, he built up the firm. In 1857 he took on Gustav Wolff from a Hamburg Jewish family and in the following year they took over Hickson's old yard on Queen's Island as a going concern. In January 1860 Edward Harland married Rosa Wann, a Belfast girl related to the Gallaher family, and from then on we may say that he was firmly settled here. The success of Harland and Wolff Limited is fully chronicled in Moss and Hume's "Shipbuilders to the World".

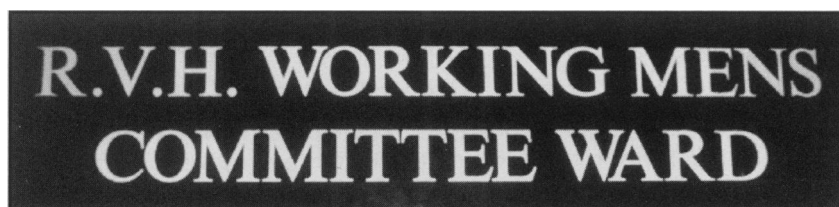
Edward Harland was elected Mayor of Belfast in 1885 and, having eased out of business by this time became heavily involved in politics against Home Rule.<sup>50</sup> He became a Unionist MP and retired to County Leitrim, when William Pirrie bought his Belfast house, Ormiston. Edward Harland concentrated on politics during his latter years being created a Baronet for this work, and died quietly at his home in Leitrim on Christmas Eve 1895. He was buried in the City Cemetery, Falls Road. His shareholding was divided between his brothers and his wife Rosa and she donated £10,000 to name a ward in his memory in 1903.<sup>51</sup>

Thus, four wards are named after leaders of the shipbuilding industry, Sir Edward Harland, Thomas Ismay and Lord and Lady Pirrie. The three men were well educated but moved from school to apprenticeship and thence quickly up the ladder in their chosen firm to the top. They all supported this hospital but it is ironical to note that their titles were given not for their work or for the generosity for which we remember them, but for "political services".

At this point the Titanic must be mentioned for there seems to be a strong belief connecting donations to the Hospital with it. However, the wards were named and the major donations given when the Hospital was opened in 1903, long before the launch and tragic sinking of the ship in 1912. The only connections are in the personalities, for Thomas Andrews, the chief designer was Sir William Pirrie's nephew. It was he who was last reported staying on the ship and throwing deck chairs to the survivors in the water though there was little hope for them in the freezing temperatures.<sup>52</sup> His behaviour is certainly one of the inspiring legends to come out of the disaster. One of the survivors was Bruce Ismay who had inherited control of the Ocean Steam Navigation Company and the White Star Line from his father Thomas Henry Ismay. He apparently, after giving assistance to several passengers, found a half-full lifeboat being lowered, so he jumped in. There was no evidence at the inquiry that his presence prevented anyone else from getting in, so he was not officially blamed. Nevertheless, many felt that as owner of the ship and knowing that she was doomed he should not have left while many women and children were still trapped there (and inevitably most of these were the third-class passengers). However, all this is a digression for it occurred long after T H Ismay's donation to the Hospital, though still before much of Lady Pirrie's work for it.



**Ward 17** When we hear the name Clarence we cannot help thinking of the unfortunate Duke who was drowned in a butt of Malmsey wine by order of Richard, Duke of Gloucester ("False, fleeting, perjured Clarence", as Shakespeare called him). In any case, this ward was not called for him. In fact, when the Hospital was opened on 27 July 1903, by King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra, they asked for a ward to be named after their eldest son, Prince Albert Victor, a later royal Duke of Clarence<sup>53</sup> as recorded in the tablet. He had been born in 1864 and in due course went into the army; he developed pneumonia in 1892 and died at the early age of 28. Albert had been engaged to marry Princess Mary of Teck and she subsequently married his brother George, the future King George V.



**Ward 18** Wards 18-20 were an extension to the original part of the 1903 hospital, opened in 1924. Ward 18 was the last to be named and it was only on 9 September 1992 that the Hospital unveiled a plaque to honour the contribution of the Working Men's Committee. (Fig. 10) A history of this body is at present being written by Professor Leslie Clarkson following the centenary of its founding.<sup>54</sup>

In 1887 the Truck Act was extended to Ireland making it illegal to deduct contributions from employee's wages. A committee was therefore formed in 1888 for "the increases of the Working Classes' subscriptions to the Hospital". With this role went the very necessary point of informing the subscribers of the work of the hospital and assuring them that it was efficiently and economically run. The committee therefore from the outset was in close touch with the matron and administration generally and took an interest in any complaints, which were then investigated. The table from the 1892 Annual Report shows the amount subscribed over the first five years and, perhaps more interestingly, the number of different places of work where subscriptions were collected.<sup>55</sup> The report stresses that although things are improving, the sums collected do not in any way cover the cost of running the Hospital – perhaps only about 25%. Other popular sources were, as stated earlier, church and street collections. Nevertheless, over the years to the present this body has collected more than



*Fig. 10* Unveiling of Memorial plaque in ward 18 to commemorate the contribution of the Working Mens' Committee to the Royal Victoria Hospital (left to right: Sir Ian Fraser, FRCS, Mr W McCann, Miss F Elliott, Prof J Bridges and Mr J McKeown (photo courtesy of Wilfred Green, Photographer).

£1,000,000 for the Hospital. In their early years particularly, deputations went round most of the firms in Belfast asking to have a representative collector nominated there. To increase the pressure, they would be armed with information as to the number of employees from that firm treated (free of charge) in the hospital during the past year. Certainly the Working Men's Committee played a large part in keeping the hospital and the citizens of Belfast in touch.

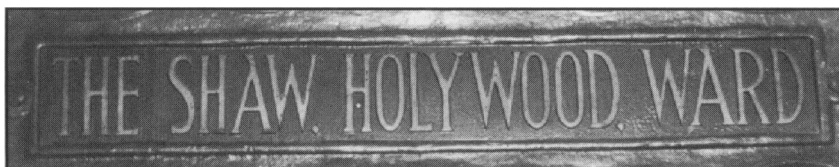
TABLE

*Record of number of places of work and subscriptions collected by the Working Men's Committee 1888-1892* <sup>55</sup>

Year	Number of work-places	Amount subscribed £
1888	137	1,563
1889	146	1,601
1890	157	1,864
1891	190	2,083
1892	200	2,177



**Ward 19** This is named after Thomas Gordon Herald who died in 1918. His father Samuel Herald of Windsor Avenue was Managing Director of the Irish Preserve and Confectionery Company at 178 Ormeau Road and when he died on 22nd August 1922 he left £20,000 to name a ward in the Royal Victoria Hospital for his son.<sup>56</sup> However Samuel Herald's widow Sarah had a life interest in the capital and the bequest did not come to the Hospital until she died on 2nd February 1943. The firm was carried on by a younger son, Robert Irwin Herald, and was still in business in the 1950s.



**Ward 20** Ward 20 was also named following a bequest in 1943, this time by Mrs Hetty Hamilton Shaw of Holywood. Her husband William Shaw, JP, had been a partner in Messrs Shaw & Jamison, wholesale druggists of Townhall Street, Belfast. He had already left the Hospital £1,000 when he died in 1925.<sup>57</sup>

The firm was founded c 1865 by Thomas Shaw and passed to his nephew William Shaw in 1882. William took on as a partner William Jamison and they erected a warehouse in Townhall Street at its junction with Musgrave Street. The description in an account of the Industries of Ireland published in 1891<sup>58</sup> gives us an example of Victorian hyperbole. "The magnificent five-storey warehouse, recently erected by the firm, has no equal in the trade in the City, is handsomely designed and offers the most commodious location imaginable for a wholesale business of great volume . . . A very convenient cart entrance, in Musgrave Street, admits the carts and runs right into the despatch department, where a powerful lift worked by a six-horse gas engine, expedites the despatch and receipt of goods. The variety of drugs, chemicals, patent and proprietary medicines and preparations is endless, while the list of general goods is no less exhaustive and complete. These include all the best lines in pickles, sauces, jams, jellies, marmalades, vinegars, meat extracts. The business, in a word, is one of marvellous extent and still rapidly expanding under the energetic direction of the enterprising proprietors".

### **BRYSON TABLET**

Having covered the dedications of the 20 main wards in the Hospital, we should also note the Bryson tablet opposite ward 12 "This tablet is erected in memory of Surgeon Major Allan Bryson who died March 8th 1874, bequeathing to this hospital the savings of his lifetime." Surgeon-Major Allan (or Allen) Bryson was

born in Carrickfergus in 1832, was a student in the Belfast General Hospital and graduated MD in Glasgow.<sup>59</sup> He joined the army in 1854 and served as a regimental medical officer in the Crimea, being promoted Staff Surgeon in 1865 with the rank of surgeon-major (equivalent to Lieut Colonel). He made a will in 1873 by which he bequeathed money to the hospital and the legacy which became available in 1879 "to be expended as the Board saw fit," amounted to £2,975, the largest bequest received in the 19th century.<sup>60</sup> Allan Bryson died on the steamship "Indus" on his passage home from India aged only 48, and was buried at sea though he is commemorated in the old graveyard in Kilroot.

It so happened that at that time the Board was anxious to move the laundry from the space under the fever wards of the General Hospital and when a new laundry had been built with some of this money (£782) the hospital was able to take twice as many fever patients and genuinely isolate them in a building of their own.

## CONCLUSION

I have stressed that the people of Belfast felt a real need for the General Hospital, the Royal Hospital and the Royal Victoria Hospital and a loyalty to them. The support for four wards came from shipping and shipbuilding, for three wards from linen, for one from property, for six from other businesses, for three from various organisations and two are dedicated to the medical profession. It came from right across the community – the very rich, the professionals and the working men. It must be said that people had to feel that they were getting good value for money, and the close contact with the Working Men's Committee is an example of this. Perhaps we need to again convince the citizens of Belfast and, indeed, of Northern Ireland that this is their hospital and is worth supporting, and perhaps we can then open a new "state of the art" building by the year 2003.

In concluding, I would like to express my thanks to Dr John Logan for many helpful discussions, and to Mr Norman McMullan and the staff of the RVH photographic department for so willingly taking the host of photographs.

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